

Pad Saddle¹

Pad saddles were an integral part of the horse-culture of the Metis people. Pad saddles were described by fur traders as early as 1754 for the Indians and Metis in the Saskatchewan valley. Lightweight and functional, these Metis saddles were made of tanned hide, shaped like a rectangular cushion, with two ovoid pillows stitched down the centre. Because of their shape, they were often referred to as “kidney saddles”. Pad saddles were stuffed with grass or animal hair and while buffalo, horse, deer and antelope hair was used, deer or antelope hair was preferred because the hair was hollow and resulted in a better cushioning. Made so the cushion could be easily opened to replace the padding, each corner was usually decorated in floral patterns. Flaps were normally attached to the sides of the saddles and were commonly decorated in geometric designs, while the saddle itself was decorated in floral designs at the corners, with the same pattern on the front corners, and a different pattern on the rear corners.



Plains Pad Saddle: Canadian Museum of Civilization CD6511-1631-3677, Image 10.

Pad saddles were very valuable to buffalo hunters, and were commonly made for sale. The lack of a pommel and cantle allowed the hunter to shoot his gun or bow freely without hindrance. In the 1800s, the manufacture of pad saddles was a huge commercial in-

¹ Portions reprinted from L. J. Barkwell, L. Dorion and A. Hourie (Eds.) *Metis Legacy: Michif Culture, Folkways and Heritage*. Saskatoon: Pemmican Publications and Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2006: 114.

dustry for Metis women as they sold large quantities Indians, European travelers, traders, and collectors. This industry was centered at Red River. The women sold to the Hudson's Bay Company, but also went south to supply the American Fur Company posts along the Missouri River in the United States. The saddle shown above is from the Canadian Museum of Civilization collection, artifact # V-X-299, photo by Harry foster, image S98-3112.



Pad Saddle at the Manitoba Museum

Gabriel Dumont's Saddle



This saddle shown in the photographs above and below is a buckskin pad saddle with commercial stirrups (c. 1870). It is in the Montana Historical Society (MHS), Luke Sweetman Collection, No. X64.16.01 (photo courtesy of MHS). Reprinted from L.J. Barkwell, L. Dorion and D. Préfontaine (Eds.) *Metis Legacy*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications and Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2001: 237.



2. Below: A plains beaded hide and cloth stuffed pad saddle of upper Missouri/Metis origin. This example, collected by Father De Smet, is from Christie's catalogue for sale #8323, Lot 104.:



Of classic form, this saddle is constructed of Indian tanned hide, sinew sewn with glass seed beads in white, black, yellow, pink, orange, blue, green, iridescent white and translucent red, faceted basket beads in blue, red and green wool, blue silk and tin cone suspensions, decorated overall with an elaborate floral design and striped tabs

Pad saddles were commonly used by the Plains Indian hunters. Many of them were produced for the Indian trade by women in the Metis settlements near the trading

posts. The beadwork on this pad saddle is typical for Missouri Metis work of the 1850s. Father De Smet frequently visited Fort Pierre in the Dakotas, which was the trade center of a Metis band that had become part of the Yankton Sioux tribe. Father De Smet's collecting activities are referred to in Chittenden and Richardson, 1905.

Ted Brassler March 14, 2000

3. A plains beaded hide and cloth unstuffed pad saddle of upper Missouri/Metis origin. Christie's catalogue for sale #8323, Lot 103.



This saddle is of classic form, constructed of Indian tanned hide, sinew sewn, glass seed beads in white, blue, black, geodesic, translucent red and green and iridescent white, red wool, blue silk, blue faceted basket beads, decorated with floral motifs $26\frac{1}{2} \times 24\frac{3}{4}$ in. (67.3 x 62.8cm.) Collected by Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, 1859, and gifted to the ancestors of the current owners. It appeared in the Washington State University exhibit, *Sacred Encounters, Father De Smet and the Indians of the Rocky Mountain West*, 1993.

The bisymmetrical beaded corner designs on this unstuffed man's saddle, with their in- and out-curved spirals and stylized flower and leaf forms, are simplified reproductions, produced at a distance, of the more elaborate multipart floral designs and solidly beaded corners made by Plains Cree or Ojibwa women. The cross-fertilization of forms and motifs on the Plateau and Northern Plains makes secure identification of such pieces difficult," (Peterson, 1993, p. 129).

4. Pad saddle from Royal Alberta Museum. *Catalogue: Pad saddle; Metis (?)*
(H62.2.334)

Royal Alberta Museum notes:

Saddles have long been a highly valued item on the northern Plains. Saddle-making was a specialized craft undertaken by women, who often ornamented their work with designs in porcupine quills and, as in this case, glass beaded embroidery and yarn fringes. Metis women were noted for their saddle-making expertise, and they doubtless made and then traded or sold to the Blackfoot, Cree, and Assiniboine many of the pad saddles now housed in museums.



Royal Alberta Museum H62.2.334.



Pad Saddle at the Duck Lake Regional Interpretive Centre.



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